



Testimony in Support of Expansion of Medical Assistant Duties ProHealth Physicians

February 21, 2017

ProHealth Physicians is a multi-specialty, multi-site medical group that employs 360 providers caring for patients at 85 locations in all eight counties of Connecticut. Approximately 95% of our providers are primary care clinicians (internal medical, family practice and pediatrics). We are committed to providing high-quality care while also controlling the overall cost of care; our primary care locations are recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance as Level III Patient-Centered Medical Homes, the highest recognition possible. We employ 286 medical assistants to support our clinicians and patients. Expansion of the duties medical assistants are permitted to perform would allow us to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our practices and clinicians while also controlling expenses and positively impacting the cost of the care we provide.

In order to have medical assistants more effectively support patient care provided by physicians and advanced practice clinicians (Advanced Practice Registered Nurse or Physician Assistant), ProHealth advocates that medical assistants who:

1. Are certified or registered by a national certifying body that is accredited by the Medical Assistant Education Review Board; and
2. Have received training in medication administration and pharmacology; and
3. Work under the supervision of and at the direction of a licensed physician or advanced practice clinician

be permitted to perform the following duties:

- Administer inhalation treatments, medications and vaccines;
- Assist with patient examinations or treatment;
- Collect laboratory specimens;
- Draw blood;
- Follow specific order sets as set for in a protocol such as standing orders for blood tests;
- Operate medical equipment;
- Perform office duties including general administrative duties;
- Prepare patients for examination and take vital signs; and
- Provide health coaching and patient education such as diabetic teaching regarding home blood sugar monitoring, pre-/post-op care instructions, etc.



We acknowledge and support that medical assistants are prohibited from making independent health assessments, judgments about medical treatment, and diagnoses, and we support that they not be permitted to:

- Independently triage patients
- Interpret diagnostic test results
- Dispense medications without a prescription
- Administer medications without orders from a licensed prescriber
- Administer medications directly into the vein

In addition, ProHealth supports clear, consistent certification and supervision requirements. All of our medical assistants work under direct supervision of a physician or advanced practice clinician.

Over a period of years, ProHealth Physicians has been actively transforming to value-based contracts that require our medical group to meet a wide range of quality metrics while also focusing on disease prevention and affordability. We meet these requirements by aligning each task with the most appropriate member of the care team and providing the necessary reporting and tracking tools, then training each role in their assigned tasks. We have been building and investing in the necessary infrastructure (including people, processes and technology) needed to support the transition to fee-for-value while we continue to be primarily reimbursed on a fee-for-service basis. This demands that each care team member work efficiently and productively while also providing a work environment that enables us to recruit and retain the best physicians, advanced practice clinicians and clinical staff.

Across the nation, burn-out is a significant issue for primary care clinicians as they work to manage patients across the continuum of care in an increasingly complex environment. Like many health care organizations, we strive to have all members of our care teams work to the top of their license, certification or training in order to get the greatest possible value from each individual's skills and training while also appropriately balancing the workload on physicians and advanced practice clinicians. Many of our 85 practices employ medical assistants exclusively and do not employ nurses. This is due to the incremental cost of employing nurses as well as the limited supply of nurses in the Connecticut market and challenges recruiting nurses to work in the ambulatory care setting. As a result of the limits on medical assistants' duties in Connecticut, physicians and advanced practice clinicians who work at practices that employ only medical assistants carry a heavier workload as they are required to perform duties that do not require their level of training or skills.